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The latest Mingus

"They're among the best records I've made," says Charles Mingus about his two latest masterpieces, **Changes One** and **Changes Two** (Atlantic). "They're both different than most albums I've done, in that there's so much variety. Nothing's quite like anything else." Those statements are so true that it's almost presumptuous to agree.

Over the years, Mingus has mastered his music with an iron hand beneath a velvet glove — or it could be the other way round. But most of all, Mingus has mastered Mingus: he has tamed his temper, mellowed his approach, deepened his feelings, and turned his musical thoughts from sheer rebellion to independant creativity.

Mingus has grown into an unerring master who triumphs painlessly over the terrible intricacies of his musical genius. That is no small task.

In these two albums, the group includes the outstanding musicians who have been playing together for two years, save for the trumpet player who has only six months with the band. In this lies the key to the ease with which they have all mastered each of the many capricious changes which are the essence of Mingus.

The tunes have been run in to perfection through countless performances and the interplay has found it's natural course. And by now, Mingus holds this band so together that he can allow his men their own creative freedom within his concept.

The result is a supreme source of joy and those two albums rank high in Mingus's own musical accomplishments. They add a new gem to the musical wealth of the 20th Century.

Numbers on Changes One include Remember Rockefeller At Attica — a typical no-nonsense Mingus bright up-tempo. The title, rather unrelated to the music, is designed to make us reflect on our environment. An explanation of that intent is enclosed in the excellent notes by Nat Hentoff.

Then there's Sue's Changes — true impressionistic music and a portrait of a delightful woman, Sue Graham, a close friend of Mingus. Her tenderness is never boring, her temper knows how to fly and how to rest, and she must have one of the most challenging dispositions to deserve such a tribute. After listening to Sue's Changes a few times, it becomes obvious that he has watched his "inspiration" with appreciation. Definitely a blessing for his fans.

Changes Two includes Orange Was The Color of Her Dress, Then Silk Blue, which has been in the Mingus repertoire for some time. It is very rich, melodically and rhythmically with moods as erratic as a butterfly's course. It is a shining example of Mingus's mercurial concepts. The interplay between the group members is superb, and so is the display of Mingus conducting. His bass reins in solos and then drives them on so subtly that it's a sublime pleasure to catch him in the process.

Mingus does not write light music and for that reason, a lot of his previous work had gone right over many people's heads. There has never been a lukewarm reaction to his music which either has been loved or hated, with a passion. Nevertheless, Mingus ranks with Ellington amongst the important composers of our time, "serious" or otherwise.

So, for those who had found the younger Mingus a little hard to take, his previous album, Moves (Atlantic) is a good place to start listening again. Changes One and Changes Two are an apotheosis of the composer's skills.

For Mingus fans, this is unadulterated bliss.

— Nighthawk

Yet another Elton

It seems as if there is a new Elton John album almost every other week. This week it's **Rock of the Westies (MCA).** It has already been hailed as "much better than his last two" but that is not saying too much. The new LP will again disappoint many who have been with Elton since the beginning.

One of Elton's trade marks used to be the great melodic quality of his songs; his songs could stand alone, apart from Elton and his production. The impression gained from his recent albums is that Elton just takes Bernie Taupin's lyrics to the recording sessions, sits down at the piano, rythmically sings the words, and presto! a new album is born.

Certainly it has worked more successfully this time but it is still Elton's vocals and production that carry the day, and not the songs themselves.

Rock of the Westies is the most straight-ahead Rock album Elton has made, only slowing down for I Feel Like a Bullet. Island Girl has some nice moments, both melodically and instrumentally, but most of the rest makes it only because it is Elton John.

*****

Paul Simon and Art Garfunkle both have new albums out.

Paul Simon is one of the great songwriters of our time and, therefore, his new LP **Still Crazy After All These Years** (Columbia) is somewhat of a disappointment. Simon has often had a melancholia underlying his songs but the melody usually had a brightness that transcended this, giving the song completeness that appealed to an incredibly wide range of people. A melancholy air dominates this album and only when Simon teams up with Art Garfunkle for My Little Town and with Phoebe Snow for Gone at Last do we see the sunshine side of Paul Simon.

As usual the album is beautifully produced and the musicianship is excellent. But, instead of being an all day album, it feels like one meant for wee small hours of the morning.

*****

Art Garfunkle does not write songs so is at the mercy of the material he chooses.

On **Breakaway** (Columbia) his choice is excellent. Richard Perry's production is, as usual, a bit sterile but the result is a very pretty album.

The old Beach Boys' song Disney Girls does not match the original but still makes an incredible lovely statement. 99 Miles from L.A. glides along with a disarming smoothness and the old Flamingo's hit, I Only Have Eyes for You, sounds great today.

As a whole the album, with its overdose of candy floss may not have enough substance for some.

— Doug Pringle

ECM — the unmatched jazz label

"I had given up on the thought of a perfect record company—until I found out about ECM," says vibraphonist Gary Burton, one of the many leading American jazzmen to be recorded by the Munich-based ECM jazz label.

With a roster also including Keith Jarrett, Chick Corea, Ralph Towner, Jack de Johnette and their associates, the company has in the space of four years become the leading recorder of contemporary jazz in the world.

All these musicians had been recorded by American companies, yet their most unique performances have been heard on ECM, mainly because the label allows them the comfort of not worrying about such age-old problems as "no commercial potential."

Fidelity

Their performances are recorded with a fidelity to the musicians' real sounds that no other company can match and, in the process, the ECM discs have attracted the imagination of jazz fanciers young and old, as well as those who've never liked "jazz" in their lives.

Much of the credit must go to owner-producer Manfred Eicher, who paid back his initial loan within four months of the company's founding and after nearly 70 albums, he has never been in the red.

It's the way he has recorded these performances that makes his discs so singular. In these days of the automated studio, Eicher spends hours selecting and positioning microphones for particular musical instruments, resulting in a quality that conveys the heart of the sound. The amazingly clear tonal qualities he conveys makes the listener feel he's hearing the music as if he was playing it.

Spontaneous

Eicher has also encouraged musicians to fulfill ideas the other companies had no faith in. Consequently, the ECM catalogue is filled with spontaneous magic performing moments, particularly with small group improvisations.

This is most dramatically demonstrated in the discs by pianist Jarrett, most obviously the **Solo Concerts: Bremen, Lausanne,** a three-disc boxed set which has won honors as the best recording of 1974 throughout the world.

Jarrett's rambling, unfolding improvisations, embracing a variety of styles, from classical to honkytonk, were recorded with remarkable sensitivity, revealing properties of the acoustic piano so often overlooked by other recordists. His latest solo album, the two-disc **Köln Concert,** recorded in the Opera House in Cologne, is even more dazzling.

Jarrett is an individualist who makes his own news, but he has evidently prompted some of his contemporaries to "get inside" their instruments.

Burton's vibes have never chimed with such clarity as on his ECM discs. There is his duet with Corea, appropriately entitled **Crystal Silence,** dominated by an atmosphere of quietude created by the sensitive interplay between piano and vibes. On **Seven Songs For Quartet and Chamber Orchestra,** the sounds are lush, flowing with a romantic edge.

On **Ring,** he enjoins his finest quintet with the German bassist Eberhard Weber, whose own ECM album, **Pictures of Chloe,** introduced the deep well-like timbre of his bass.

With Burton's bassist Steve Swallow adding darting counterpoint, and two electric guitarists (Mick Goodrick and Pat Metheny) playing "jazz-rock" as delicately as anyone, Ring has a remarkably magestral sound to it: full, flighty, floaty.

Burton's latest discs are duets with Swallow (**Hotel Hello**) and guitarist Towner (**Matchbook**), both abounding with tonal, harmonic and melodic ideas.

Revealed

The label has brought to the fore talents that had been relegated to supportive roles by the popular jazzrock stars of today. On **Timeless,** electric guitarist John Abercrombie, introduced via Billy Cobham's records, leads a distinctive trio comprised of organist-synthist Jan Hammer (late of the Mahavishnu Orchestra) and drummer Jack de Johnette. The disc features both rushing pumping uptempo numbers and more reflective spacier compositions, the dynamics of each given complete life with Eicher's production care.

Herbie Hancock's longtime reedman Bennie Maupin makes his solo debut with **The Jewel In the Lotus,** ambitious orchestrations of moody themes, played by Hancock and cohorts.

Perhaps the brightest ECM record to be released in North America recently is Chick Corea's original **Return to Forever** session.

Communication

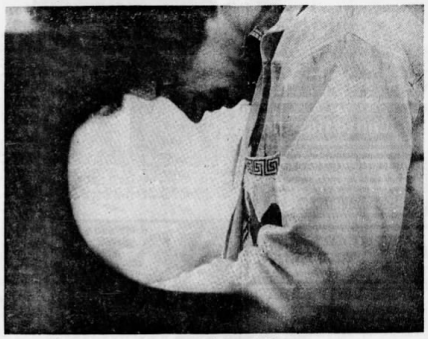
Corea had previously starred with Miles Davis and gone through a period of abstract explorations in Europe with a group called Circle (their **Paris Concert** is on ECM), while he found himself in a mood for more relaxed latin-flavored electric jazz. The resulting session spurred Corea's move to communicate with mass audiences and, as the group has gone through personnel changes and into a tougher pitchier style, **Return to Forever** stands as Corea's most lyrical and pleasing group session.

It's interesting to note that all the members of the original group—singer Flora Purim, percussionist Airto Moreira, bassist Stan Clirke and flautist-saxophonist Joe Farrell—have all issued albums of their own. Together, in those particular moments in time, their sounds have a dewey alive feel to them.

Lifted

Not only has ECM lifted the restrictions for American musicians but the label has introduced a new generation of European jazz players.

The most impressive is Polish saxophonist Jan Garbarek, who leads a quartet with Jarrett on **Belonging.** Supported by a smart Scandenavian rhythm section (Pale Danielsson, on Christensen), they display the kind of stark unmodded communication that has given credence to ECM's slogan, "The most beautiful sound next to silence."



ECM recorded Keith Jarrett in Cologne

Rock & Pop
by Juan Rodriguez

Gallery roundup

Whimsy hurts ceramics; awkward figures

(Continued from P. 32)

polyester resin and numerous other materials, are formalized but entirely recognizable depictions of her subject.

Abstracted from the body, they usually form part of a rounded mass and are presented almost as though they were distinct, individual personalities. (In general the smooth surfaces works are more thought-provoking than the wooden, nail-studded ones. The fetish-like and decorative character of these latter makes them fall more readily into familiar and easily accepted categories in the viewer's mind.)

Attempting to be "life-affirming" and healthy rather than pornographic, Zack succeeds to a considerable degree. The characteristics of vulnerability and mystery are very much in evidence — so much so that, inadvertently perhaps, her work raises the question of privacy. My own reaction was that a certain intrinsic privacy had been unwittingly invaded. Still, the fact Zack manages to do this today when nudity etc in art hardly elicits a response in many cases, is itself quite an achievement.

Cute carrots

Leopold Foulem's exhibition of ceramics at the Visual Arts Centre (350 Victoria Ave., to Nov. 22) is entitled "The Carrots are Gorgeous This Year."

And unfortunately the cuteness of the title is reflected in the show. Carrots in a nest on a red and white polka dot branch; carrots sprouting out of green grass, from a mound studded with bottle tops, from a light socket, and rising from a frying pan (shades of David Gilhooley!). Plastic decorations and other doodads are much in evidence.

Some of Foulem's pieces have a nice smoothness and clarity of form (the cut-out pear on a pedestal, for example, which reminded me of those kitchen plaques people used to hang over their stoves). And the "islands," like a naive artist's idea of a birdbath, are fun too. There are some other nice pieces too, but they are regretably overwhelmed in an overall atmosphere of calculated whimsy.

Naked tableaux

At Yajima, (1625 Sherbrooke West, to Nov. 22) Buffalo, N.Y., photographer Les Krims' photographs include tableaux of such sights as a naked woman with fishhooks embedded in her skin, and naked friends of the photographer pissing portraits of well-known photographers in sand — as well as some more conventional new-style photography. I did not find Krims' work either significant or meaningful.

Subtle etchings

Roslyn Swartman has a new sense of expansiveness in her etchings based on rock formations at Gallery 1640 (1445 Crescent, to Nov. 22). In some especially successful pieces, brilliant colors and subtle textures are brought together in dramatic chunks of folded, striated rock.

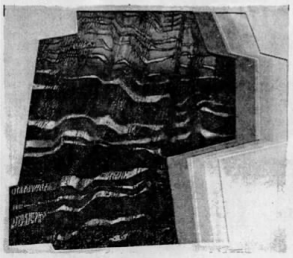
In her notes on the show, Swartman speaks of being inspired by cave drawings she saw in the American Southwest. Well and good. But including the cave drawings in some of the etchings was not such a good idea. Transposed, these odd, simple little figures look just awkward and ill at ease. Swartman also has interesting photo-etchings — a new field for her, and watercolors. The latter though, seem more like preliminary studies than finished pieces.

Refreshing

At Saicon Les Images, (203 Saint- Denis, to Nov. 27) Sylvie Paradis' small prints and drawings, for the most part involving black and white figures, are refreshingly unassuming. And the successes far outnumber the misses in this large selection of thoughtful sensitive evocations of mood.

At times the combinations of figures and landscape recall Monique Charbonneau, for instance in the "Deux Personnages et la Neige." Some of the woodcuts, with their stark contrasts of black and white forms, are particularly appealing.

There are also paintings, but it is the graphic works which make the show. Paradis' prices are very low, starting at $20 for a very small framed print, and $40 for the smallest watercolor cut-outs.



Roslyn Swartzman's Man's Heritage

An etching by Sylvie Paradis

Grapes again

It's those green grapes again! Super-magic realist Michel Pelius (at the Saidye Bronfman Centre, 9170 Côte Sainte Catherine Road, to Nov. 25) paints trees like bunches of them and clouds like snowballs. Pelius has an almost photographic ability at putting things down — his wistful self-portrait for instance. But his supperrealitic figures are set in magical Kewpie-land backgrounds of strange trees and clouds, ribbon-like roads and manicured lawns that end in cut-out cliffs.

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